



THE CHINESE BLACK CHAMBER

An Adventure in Espionage
HERBERT O. YARDLEY

Introduction by JAMES BAMFORD
Author of THE PUZZLE PALACE

THE CHINESE BLACK CHAMBER

Other books by Herbert O. Yardley

The American Black Chamber

Yardleygrams

The Blonde Countess

Red Sun of Nippon

Crows Are Black Everywhere
(with Carl Grabo)

The Education of a Poker Player

中國黑室

THE CHINESE BLACK CHAMBER

*An Adventure
in Espionage*

Herbert O.
Yardley

Houghton Mifflin Company
Boston 1983

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Yardley, Herbert O. (Herbert Osborn), 1889-1958.

The Chinese black chamber

Chinese title on added t.p.: Chung-kuo hei shih.

1. Sino-Japanese Conflict, 1937-1945 — Secret service — China. 2. Sino-Japanese Conflict, 1937-1945 — Personal narratives, American. 3. Yardley, Herbert O. (Herbert Osborn), 1889-1958. I. Title. II. Title: Chung-kuo hei shih.

DS777.533.S65Y37 1983 940.53 83-8562
ISBN 0-395-34648-7

Printed in the United States of America

Q 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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INTRODUCTION

by James Bamford

Twenty miles north of Washington, D.C., on more than a thousand acres of Fort George G. Meade, the largest intelligence organization in the free world makes its home. Created in total secrecy by President Truman in 1952, the National Security Agency quietly diverts many of the world's private, commercial, diplomatic, and military communications into a hidden city of nearly two dozen heavily guarded buildings of brick, glass, and cement. One, the Headquarters-Operations complex, is soon to become the second biggest single building in the entire federal government. Only the Pentagon is larger.

Buried deep in the bowels of the Headquarters-Operations Building is the largest concentration of computers on earth; the space taken up by the supermachines is measured not by the square foot, but by the acre. Here, on thin, laser-recorded optical discs, each containing more than a hundred billion bits of information, and on thousands of miles of magnetic tape, is the counterpart of Jorge Luis Borges's fabled infinite library, in which all of the planet's knowledge and information reside, maddeningly encoded.

To unscramble these complex ciphers the NSA relies on such computers as the CRAY-1, which has a memory unit capable of transferring up to 320 million words per second, or the equivalent of about twenty-five-hundred 300-page books; and on laser printers, which can place those words on endless miles of paper at the rate of 22,000 lines per minute. And soon to be

put into practical form by NSA's Research and Engineering Organization are such strange-sounding concepts as Josephson Junction technology, magnetic bubbles, analog optical computing technology, and light-sound interaction and charge-transfer devices, which will be capable of performing more than one quadrillion (or 1,000,000,000,000,000) operations a second.

But long before there was a CRAY-I or even an NSA, there was simply a young man with nothing more than a sharp mind and very farsighted vision. His name was Herbert Osborn Yardley.

In the black and gray world of espionage and codebreaking, Herbert O. Yardley was a Calder mobile of bright bold colors. He was a free spirit in a land of cenobites. Born on April 13, 1889, in the small southwestern Indiana town of Worthington, young Yardley would later develop a talent for unscrambling foreign codes and ciphers that may well have grown from a far less clandestine but equally challenging (and possibly more profitable) avocation: poker. When he was not running for president of his high school class, editing the school paper, and acting as captain of the football team, he could usually be found in a saloon called Monty's Place, picking up pointers from Old Salty East and Mont Mull, or else at one of the other ten saloons or three poolrooms in Worthington.

Following high school, Yardley went off to the University of Chicago, but left after only a year and returned to Worthington to work as a railroad telegrapher. He had learned the trade from his father, who was employed as a railroad agent. But soon the monotony of tapping out freight delays and passenger reservations began to dull his spirit, and in 1912, at the age of twenty-three, he passed his telegraph key to someone else and climbed aboard a train bound for Washington's Union Station.

On November 16, shortly after he arrived, Yardley was again reading messages coming in by telegraph, but this time the view from his window was not the flat Indiana countryside; it was the tennis court on the South Lawn of the White House. He was

working as an \$18.75-a-week code clerk for the State Department and had become a silent spectator of American diplomacy. But as he listened to the stuttering resonators and sounders on the oak telegraph table, he began to wonder how many other silent spectators might be copying and deciphering those same highly confidential missives; he knew it was a practice engaged in by other countries. Then it struck him: Why shouldn't the United States employ such "decipherers" to solve the secret codes and ciphers of others? "As I asked myself this question," he later wrote, "I knew that I had the answer . . . to a purpose in life. I would devote my life to cryptography."

Yardley read the few works on the subject at the Library of Congress and began practicing on the State Department's own messages. To his amazement, he solved in less than two hours a coded, personal message sent to President Wilson by his special envoy, Colonel House. Convinced that if he could so easily solve American codes, other countries could too, he drew up a paper on the subject for his superior, David Salmon. Salmon was shocked and quickly came up with another code, but just as quickly Yardley was back with the solution.

With the outbreak of World War I, Yardley switched from State to the War Department where, on June 29, 1917, he organized Section Eight of Military Intelligence (MI-8), responsible for all code and cipher work within the division. This was the first link in the long genealogical chain that would eventually lead to the present National Security Agency.

Lieutenant, later Major, Yardley quickly proved the worth of the cipher organization, and by the time of the Armistice, on November 11, 1918, MI-8 had solved a total of 10,735 messages sent by foreign governments, a truly impressive accomplishment. At the time the war ended, Yardley was in Paris, trying to nudge a greater degree of cooperation out of the secret French *Chambre Noire*. It was decided that he should remain in the French capital to run a code bureau attached to the American Commission to the Peace Conference.

On April 18, 1919, Herbert Yardley returned to the United

States and began arguing for a peacetime continuation of the codebreaking activities of MI-8. He submitted a memorandum describing a Cipher Bureau, to consist of fifty cipher experts and clerks, with a budget of \$100,000 and himself as chief. Within a few days both the State and War Departments agreed to fund jointly the secret organization, and on May 20 America's Black Chamber was born.

Housed in a four-story brownstone at 3 East 38th Street, under the cover of a commercial code company, the Black Chamber found its prime targets in the code and cipher systems of an increasingly aggressive Japan. Yardley promised to solve them within a year or resign. And in one of the most important achievements in American cryptologic history, Yardley succeeded, with months to spare.

Just how valuable Yardley's breakthrough was became abundantly clear during the 1921-1922 Washington Disarmament Conference. The goal of the five-nation conference was to set limits on the tonnage of warships sailing the world's oceans, and the chief objective of the State Department was to limit Japan to a ratio of 6 to 10, in favor of the United States. Although Japan was publicly insisting that the lowest it would go was a 7-to-10 ratio, Yardley's Black Chamber knew differently. Through the intercepted and deciphered Japanese messages passing between that country's negotiators, Yardley had learned of Tokyo's hole card: if necessary it would drop down to the 6-to-10 ratio. Following Yardley's advice, the State Department held tight, and, as the cipher chief predicted, Tokyo eventually threw in its hand.

With the end of the conference, on February 6, 1922, the Black Chamber began to die. Because of new laws guaranteeing the secrecy of communications, as well as because of policy disagreements between the federal government and Western Union, the Chamber's secret supply of telegrams was all but cut off. At the same time, with both the war and the disarmament conference receding from memory, the State Department

started to cut back on Yardley's budget. This was especially serious, because it was from the State Department that the Black Chamber was now deriving the bulk of its financing.

By 1924 Yardley's budget had been slashed to a quarter of its original \$100,000, the staff reduced to a meager seven, and the roomy town house abandoned for two small rooms in an office building at 52 Vanderbilt Avenue. Ironically, however, what eventually doomed the Black Chamber was not apathy, but moralistic outrage.

In March 1929 Herbert Hoover entered the White House and conservative Henry L. Stimson took over the State Department. Two months later the new Secretary of State discovered the Black Chamber and angrily denounced it with what no doubt has become the most famous quotation in the history of American cryptology: "Gentlemen do not read each other's mail." At midnight on October 31, 1929, the Black Chamber was permanently bolted shut.

For Yardley, things could not have looked darker. Not only was he out of work and experienced only in breaking foreign codes and ciphers, but the stock market had just crashed and the Great Depression was now underway. Packing his bags, he headed back home to Worthington. There was no more need for codebreakers in southwestern Indiana than there was in New York, though, and Yardley, broke and with a wife and son to feed, began to feel desperate. There was one thing he could do: he could write a book describing his exploits as chief of the Black Chamber.

Yardley's decision to write the account was not arrived at lightly. "Ever since the war I have consistently fought against disclosing anything about codes and ciphers," he once wrote to a friend. "My reason is obvious: it warns other governments of our skill and makes our work more difficult."

But, Yardley reasoned, the situation had now changed. America no longer had a Cipher Bureau, nor was it still engaged in codebreaking, so what was there to injure? In fact, he

concluded, publication might even have the beneficial effect of forcing the State Department to reconsider its unwise decision to close the Black Chamber.

With the help of a New York literary agent, George T. Bye, Yardley began his career as an author. His story first appeared in three excerpts in the *Saturday Evening Post* during April and May 1931, and on June 1 *The American Black Chamber*, published by the Bobbs-Merrill Company, made its appearance. It was about to become one of the most controversial books in American literary history.

The public rushed to buy the book, and the critics gave it their blessing, one calling it "the most sensational contribution to the secret history of the war, as well as the immediate post-war period, which has yet been written by an American." More recently, the author and code expert David Kahn wrote, "I devoured it. It was one of the most thrilling books I have ever read."

In Washington, the administration coldly denied Yardley's story, but privately officials were outraged. They considered a legal prosecution, but rejected the idea when they were advised that it would be both compromising and embarrassing. Nor could they find a precedent that would give them an excuse to suppress the book.

Yardley became something of a celebrity and — at a time when author tours were not usual — he traveled the country, boasting of the Black Chamber's successes and warning of a bleak future without it. Then, as lecture bookings fell off, Yardley turned to a new project. He decided to tell the story of the Washington Disarmament Conference as only he could — including copies of the intercepted signal traffic between Tokyo and the Japanese negotiators in Washington. With the assistance of an amateur writer named Marie Stuart Klooz, Yardley produced the 970 pages of *Japanese Diplomatic Secrets: 1921-22* in two months.

Bobbs-Merrill, however, had been thoroughly scared. Not

only did they reject the book, but D. L. Chambers, the firm's president, notified the Attorney General that the new manuscript contained the text of many Japanese messages.

Now the State Department panicked. At State's instance, three officers from the War Department went to Worthington and demanded that Yardley return all official documents. He replied that he had none that "would injure the strength of the United States Government."

But the government did succeed when Yardley's agent delivered the manuscript to the Macmillan Company. Thomas E. Dewey, then Assistant U.S. Attorney in New York, enlisted the cooperation of George Brett, Macmillan's president, and on February 20, United States marshals took the manuscript from Macmillan.

It was not the first or the last time a publishing house would participate in suppressing its own book, but it was the first time in history that the federal government had confiscated a manuscript for security reasons. More than forty-six years later, parts of the *Japanese Diplomatic Secrets* remained classified.

To ensure that Yardley produced no more exposés, the State Department got Congress to pass a law making it a crime to publish any material that has been prepared in any official diplomatic code. And that law is still on the books.

None of this discouraged Yardley from his new career as an author. He turned from nonfiction with a sprinkling of fiction to fiction with a sprinkling of fact. In his 1934 effort, *The Blonde Countess*, the chief of a secret Washington bureau during World War I unmasks a beautiful German spy. "Mr. Yardley knows his spy stuff and can tell a good story," wrote the *Saturday Review of Literature*.

The Red Sun of Nippon was finished six months later. Again, the plot revolved around espionage and diplomatic intrigue as the love affair between a young State Department employee and a beautiful Chinese woman led to the uncovering of a Japanese plot to conquer Manchuria. In 1935 more success came with a

movie sale. MGM — with Yardley as technical adviser — brought *The Blonde Countess* to the silver screen under the title *Rendezvous*, starring William Powell, Rosalind Russell, and Caesar Romero.

In 1936, the world was attacked by an outbreak of small troubles that often signal worse things ahead. Germany moved its troops into the demilitarized Rhineland; Franco launched his rebellion in Spain. "One cannot help feeling," President Franklin Roosevelt wrote his ambassador in France, "that the whole European panorama is fundamentally blacker than at any time in your lifetime or mine."

In the Orient, the Japanese empire was on the move. In 1937, its armies invaded China, and by the end of July, Peking and Tientsin had fallen. Then came the heavy bombing of Shanghai and the sack of Nanking. As the Chinese Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek, withdrew his troops and transferred his capital to remote Chungking, the American people became more and more sympathetic with his cause. The President was sympathetic, too, but he was also wary of provoking Japanese retaliation, so the United States did no more than supply arms to the desperate Chinese.

Chiang, in the midst of a war that was quickly becoming increasingly technological, felt a pressing need for better intelligence; specifically, for better signals intelligence. He asked the Chinese embassy in Washington to see whether one of the most gifted — and most notorious — figures in the field, Herbert Yardley, once again would perform his magic on Japanese codes and ciphers.

By now Yardley was settled in Queens and feeling bored with life as a real estate speculator. His "cipher brain" sorely missed the challenge of coded messages, and his hands itched to work out their solutions. When he was approached by Major Hsiao, the Chinese assistant military attaché, with the offer to come to Chungking, Yardley could hardly contain his excitement. He

did, however, hold it in well enough to get the Chinese to raise his salary to about \$10,000 a year. In addition, Yardley asked Hsiao for another favor — permission to bring with him to China the beautiful woman with whom he had recently fallen in love, Edna Ramsaier.

Twenty years earlier, Yardley had met Edna when, just out of high school, she had arrived at the Black Chamber in New York, applying for her first job. It was only after several nervous passes that she decided to enter the forbidding brownstone. Now the former chief and his long-time assistant were very much in love. Despite the sentiment, however, Hsiao could not authorize Yardley to have anyone accompany him to China.

In September of 1938, after several months of secret conferences with Major Hsiao, Yardley slipped out of the country and arrived in China under the *nom de guerre* of Herbert Osborn, ostensibly an exporter of hides. His chief was the stern-faced General Tai Li, head of the Chinese Secret Service and a man greatly feared throughout China, as evidenced by his nicknames: "the Killer" and "the Generalissimo's Number One Hatchet Man." Almost never was Tai's real name mentioned. According to Yardley, the graduate of China's prestigious Whampoa Military Academy had at one time spent several months in Shanghai attempting to engineer the assassination of one of his foes, Wang Ching-wei.

The Chinese Black Chamber, as Yardley later called it, was overly decentralized and in utter disarray when he arrived. It was loosely headed by a mysterious Chinese official who had been working on intercept and codebreaking for about ten years, but whose connection with the activity was known only to one or two persons in the Chinese government, and perhaps was never revealed even to Yardley. Below him were five entirely separate organizations, comprising, in all, about 800 people, which Yardley first sought to combine into one single unit. It was his hope eventually to become the head of the massive

new organization. The reorganization, however, would be slow and painstaking.

Nightlife in Chungking was considerably less than that to which Yardley had become accustomed. Although his hosts had provided him with a house, he could usually be seen hunched over a deck of cards at the Chungking Hostel, a government-run hotel for foreigners on official business. Here the fifty-year-old dealer in hides would drink, play poker, and swap bawdy stories with the few other Westerners still hanging on in wartime Chungking. One of his best friends was George Schwer, a former enlisted man in the U.S. Navy who had decided to remain in China and had opened a business in town.

Another close friend was a green, twenty-three-year-old stringer for *Time* magazine, fresh out of Harvard. Theodore H. White, later to become renowned for his books on American presidential elections, had arrived in Chungking about five months after Yardley. A Chinese history major, White had traveled to China on a fellowship and managed to talk himself into a job in Chiang Kai-shek's government as adviser to the Chinese Ministry of Information, a job, he later recalled in his book *In Search of History*, * in which his principal mission was to "manipulate American public opinion." He added, "The support of America against the Japanese was the government's one hope for survival; to sway the American press was critical. It was considered necessary to lie to it, to deceive it, to do anything to persuade America that the future of China and the United States ran together against Japan."

Quickly tiring of his life as a propagandist, White signed on with *Time*. Between dodging bombs and sending "mailers" back to New York, White would frequent the Chungking Hostel, where he often rubbed shoulders with Yardley, of whom he later wrote, with fondness:

*(New York: Harper & Row), 1978.

"Osborn" took a fancy to me. He was a man of broad humor and unrestrained enthusiasms, and among his enthusiasms were drink, gambling and women. He decided after we had become friends that he should teach me poker, which he did by letting me stand over his shoulder and watch him unfold his hands and sweep up the pots. He also felt I should be taught sex, and tried to persuade me to sample that experience by inviting some of the choicest ladies he knew to a banquet in his house. I would not learn; Boston was still strong in me. But he did teach me something more important than anything I have learned since from any official American adviser or wise man: how to behave in an air raid. Yardley's theory was that if a direct hit landed on you, nothing would save you. The chief danger of an air raid, he said, was splintered glass from windows. Thus, when one hears the siren, one should get a drink, lie down on a couch and put two pillows over oneself — one pillow over the eyes and the other over the groin. Splintered glass could hurt those vital organs, and if the eyes or the groin were injured, life was not worth living. It was good advice for any groundling in the age before atom bombs; and I took it. Yardley was excessively kind to me, as were so many older men in Chiang K'ai-shek's Chungking.

By the end of his first year, Yardley had become severely homesick. Long periods of heavy drinking were interspersed with brief periods of total abstinence. His health was deteriorating, and he had lost a considerable amount of weight. By now, rumors of his true identity and the nature of his work were becoming open secrets among the small fraternity of foreigners, which included the officers of the American gunboat U.S.S. *Tutuila*.

By the summer of 1939, the rumors had reached the ears of Major David D. Barrett, the assistant United States military attaché in Chungking. He began trying to establish contact with the elusive Mr. Osborn, but Yardley carefully avoided him. Finally, on September 13, 1939, Barrett sent a secret message to Colonel E. R. W. McCabe, head of Military Intelligence (G-2) at the War Department. "Can you tell me if Yardley (of the

'Black Chamber') has left America?" Barrett wrote, adding, "According to a reliable report he or another individual of his trade has been employed since about May 25 by the Nationalist Government."

Military Intelligence had kept close track of Yardley throughout the 1930s and had known all along of his work in China. Since Yardley was a free agent, and America at the time benignly supported the Chinese Nationalists in their struggle against Japan, it was felt best to let sleeping dogs lie and not inform the embassy officials in Chungking. But now the situation had changed, and the War Department was trying to decide whether to take advantage of the situation.

Five days later, McCabe sent off a message to Barrett, informing him that the rumor was fact and authorizing him to approach Yardley very discreetly and "inquire if results of his work can be made available to you." McCabe noted that "particular interest attaches to material pertaining to military subjects." By now America was regarding Japan with fear. Apprehension of war in the Pacific was increasing daily, and it was hoped that Yardley could serve as a shortcut to breaking the Japanese army code. The enormous consequences of a leak, however, led McCabe to advise the military attaché, "Be guarded in your radio messages about this matter even when in secret code." So Yardley's name was never again mentioned in any other communication between Barrett and McCabe.

Yardley had good reason for being cautious. His chief, General Tai, had warned him about having any contact with foreigners or even with Chinese outside his own section. He also knew he was constantly being watched. After Yardley had been in China for a while, he had asked for and been granted a certain amount of freedom — but associating with an employee of the American embassy would be looking for trouble. Therefore, it was more than five months before Barrett was able to meet Yardley.

Tai was curious about the American diplomat's frequent

overtures, and Yardley informed him that, as an American citizen, he would naturally have occasional contact with the American embassy. Now he felt free to meet with Barrett, even though the fact of the meeting would most surely be reported back to his Chinese superiors.

On Thursday, February 22, 1940, Barrett and a very nervous Herbert Osborn Yardley met for the first time. Yardley told Barrett that until recently he had very much wanted to leave China after the expiration of his contract on March 31, but now had decided to stay on under an oral contract, provided that suitable terms could be reached. He also said that chances were good that he would be placed in full control of the newly centralized "Black Chamber."

Yardley spoke of the strain he had been under all these months in Chungking and told Barrett of his hope of visiting the fronts at Hunan and Kwangai in a week or so. He also mentioned that he was trying to improve the interception of messages sent from inside Japanese lines by long wave.

Barrett, in a low voice, delicately brought up the subject of Yardley's secretly cooperating with the American government and supplying material dealing with Japanese military traffic. Yardley had felt all along that this was what Barrett wanted, and he seemed pleased that his suspicions had been confirmed. He told the attaché that he would be very happy to cooperate with the War Department and asked him to find out, as soon as possible, specifically what the department wanted.

Major Barrett hurried back to the embassy and sent off a one-and-a-half-page message to Colonel McCabe, describing the results of the meeting. In Washington it was agreed that the material most needed was copies of the field cryptographic systems employed by the Japanese army — if they could be obtained without compromise.

Remembering Yardley's lack of discretion once before, McCabe worried that the approach to him might backfire and damage American foreign relations. For that reason, he advised

Barrett to use extreme caution in any dealings with Yardley. "Maintain absolutely reserved but friendly relations with him without any commitment or encouragement which he might interpret as an approach to obtain his services," the colonel wrote. Hoping that Yardley's cooperation could be won simply by waving the flag, McCabe added: "If without solicitation and as a matter of patriotism he should offer you information especially concerning the cryptographic systems employed by units of the Japanese Army in the field you are authorized to accept it." Other information, Barrett was told, "is not desired."

On Friday, March 8, two weeks after the first meeting, Barrett again met Yardley and told him of G-2's response. Yardley said that he would try to get his new contract to stipulate that he be given complete records of all work done by his section. He added that his section had achieved definite success in breaking the Japanese military codes, and he explained that delivering the requested material would not only entail a great deal of hard work and the exercise of careful diplomacy, but would also involve considerable risk. Too much risk for patriotism alone, Yardley said, adding that he felt the patriots working in Washington for the government were certainly well paid, and he saw no reason why he should not be compensated for his services. In addition, he claimed that the material would be worth at least \$100,000 to the American government.

In return for secretly delivering to Barrett at intervals "complete technical records all steps in busting Jap military codes," Yardley wanted nothing for himself, but insisted on an agreement whereby the government would find a position paying \$6,000 a year for the woman he missed dearly, Edna Ramsaier. He argued that Edna had been his assistant in the Black Chamber and that her services were worth at least \$2000; the remaining \$4000, he told Barrett, could be considered compensation for his risk.

G-2 found Yardley's condition totally unacceptable. They had never been more than lukewarm over the idea of dealing

with him in the first place, and now decided to give a flat no to his condition. The major reason for worry was the fear that on his return from China Yardley might once again become literary and leave all those involved with a large order of egg on their faces. More important, however, and an argument most likely made by the War Department's Signal Intelligence Service, was that the SIS had already solved Purple, Japan's most secret diplomatic crypto system, after several years of work, and if Yardley ever wrote about selling one of their codes to America, the Japanese would again completely overhaul their cryptographic system, and the work of almost a decade would be lost.

Ironically, on March 4, 1940, only four days before Yardley's meeting with Barrett, Edna had been hired to work in the SIS by its chief cryptologist, William F. Friedman, a bitter, long-time rival of Yardley. At the time, Friedman had no idea of her relationship with Yardley, and when he found out he was furious and eventually gave her her notice. But Edna went over his head, appealed the firing, and was reinstated. Having won her point, however, she decided instead to work for the Weather Service.

Yardley was greatly disappointed by the rejection of his proposal. He had hoped that it would be a possible lead-in to a position in the United States. Nevertheless, he was not yet ready to concede defeat, and when Major William Mayer, the U.S. military attaché, arrived for a visit from Peking, Yardley brought him up to date on the proposal he had made to Barrett, the assistant attaché. Then, to show his sincerity and his ability to produce, Yardley handed Mayer a memorandum he had drawn up for General Tai, describing the progress of his unit since his arrival. In the memorandum, Yardley had listed nineteen different Japanese systems the unit had broken. In the next paragraph he explained that some time before, he had instructed his students to write detailed reports showing exactly how each of the systems was broken. "These MMS will be

invaluable for future reference," Yardley added in his memorandum.

Now, pointing to this paragraph, Yardley told Major Mayer that he would be willing to offer the War Department copies of those reports. Mayer, doubting that Yardley could actually produce all that he said he could, noted in a letter to Military Intelligence in Washington that even if he could, he might not be able to get away with it. "I am certain that he is under surveillance and believe that the Chinese would know of any transfer of data he might make," Mayer wrote. Washington agreed, and again Yardley was left without a buyer for his goods.

By now his contract was almost up, and he had to decide whether to remain in China or return to the United States and again face an uncertain future. Yardley, always looking for a better bargaining position, notified General Tai that he had been informed by Major Mayer of the War Department's urgent need for him in Washington. Later that day, Yardley went over to Mayer's office and told him he was hoping for better terms on a new contract and asked him to back up his story. The major told Yardley in no uncertain terms that the War Department had made no such offer and that, if asked, he would tell the truth.

Several days later, General Tai asked Mayer to come to his office. Stressing the great friendship between the two countries, Tai asked about his approach to Yardley regarding a return to the United States. He emphasized that Yardley's work was by no means complete, and said that they were eager to keep him in Chungking for at least another year. Mayer replied that the War Department had made no request for Yardley's return.

Delighted, Tai then advised the major that if any results were achieved from Yardley's work, arrangements might be made to turn the material over to him, Mayer, for use by the American government. An astonished Mayer told Tai that, though he had no instructions on the point from the War Department, he

personally believed that the information would be most welcome. Tai said they could talk more about the deal later, when the material was in shape. He also told Mayer that he would prefer to keep the whole matter on a personal basis between the two of them and not make it an official arrangement between their respective governments.

Mayer, notifying Washington, questioned whether the general might have been fishing for money, although he tended to doubt it. Colonel J. A. Crane, in charge of the Military Attaché Section, decided to leave the matter up to Mayer, but advised him, "If he should voluntarily make any of the material available to you, of course you may accept it but with the clear understanding that it is not on a reciprocal or purchase basis."

By June, the question had become moot. Physically sick — he had lost almost forty pounds — and unable to work because of intensive bombings, Yardley decided he had had enough. On Saturday, July 13, 1940, he boarded a plane and bade farewell to China.

Yardley — now reunited with Edna in Washington — completed a brief assignment for the Signal Corps, which involved describing his solutions of the Japanese army crypto systems. He then went on to other codebreaking exploits in the employ of the Canadian government and its new signals intelligence operation, the Examination Unit. When, for various reasons, that assignment came to an end, Edna and Herbert returned to Washington.

Yardley ended his long career in breaking codes and turned instead to breaking eggs; he opened a restaurant on the corner of 13th and H Streets. The Rideau was less than a smashing success; as Edna Yardley said with a laugh many years later, "That man was not fit for a restaurant."

Throughout the rest of the war and into the 1950s Yardley, banished from the field he himself had helped found, undertook a variety of jobs, including one as a ration enforcement officer

with the Office of Price Administration. In 1945, together with an old friend, Carl Grabo, he wrote another novel, *Crows Are Black Everywhere*, which concerned the adventures of a woman journalist in war-torn Chungking. Later he wrote *The Chinese Black Chamber*, dealing with his days as a codebreaker in China, but, fearing renewed action by the federal government, decided not to submit the manuscript for publication. In 1957 he did publish *The Education of a Poker Player*, an enormously successful book, still in print, that explains the mysteries of the card game to enthusiasts. Ted White, his old friend from China, has called it a "major contribution to the American folk culture" and "as important in the education of the young poker-players as a sex manual is to a college freshman."

On Thursday, August 7, 1958, nine months after the *Poker Player* was released, America's most famous cryptologist died of a stroke suffered eight days earlier. He was sixty-nine. Four days later he was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. The *New York Times* in its obituary called Yardley "the father of cryptography in the United States," a title that in fact he shared with others. But through his MI-8 and Black Chamber, Yardley had firmly set in place the foundation on which today's enormous and vital National Security Agency rests. And through *The American Black Chamber*, he had brought American cryptology out of the closet once and for all.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ling Fan *Chinese Interpreter*
Shon Ging *Chinese Girl*
Ching Pu *Chinese Scholar*
Number One *The Hatchet Man*
Number Two *His Assistant*
George McKay *Eurasian*
Wang Ching-wei *Chinese Traitor*
Shiu Chen *His Concubine*
General Tseng *Chief of Sabotage*
Lao Tsai *Chinese Houseboy*
Yang *Chinese Merchant*
Lao Fong *Chinese Chauffeur*
Hu Yeh *Chinese Girl*
Chen Huan *Chinese Engineer*
Tsu Fu
 Chinese Translator of Japanese
Fen Tao *Chinese Chauffeur*
Marguerite
 Chinese Sing-Song Girl
Elaine *Chinese Demimondaine*
One-Armed Bandit
 Chinese Traitor

Dorothy *His White Mistress*
Wu Fou *Chinese Interpreter*
Lao Han *Chinese Houseboy*
Schwer
 American Businessman
Pop *German Expatriate*
Herr Weiner *German Adviser*
Zelda *Russian Jewess*
Stephanie *Russian Girl*
Ted White *American Newsman*
Maya *Polish Girl*
Gilbert *English Adviser*
Stoney *Irish Adviser*
Ping *Chinese Informant*
Crofton *English Code Clerk*
Emily Hahn
 American Journalist
Ing-ing *Chinese Child Slave*
Maria *German Girl*
German Refugee *Japanese Spy*
Dr. Turnipseed
 American Officer

"This long-suppressed book by a pioneer American codebreaker is not a technical treatise on the art of reading other gentlemen's mail; instead, it is a sheer delight, a rollicking diary of Yardley's three years in wartime China . . . a hilarious, as well as caustic, observation . . . by one of this century's most unusual personalities. He could have served as a Somerset Maugham model. Mark Twain would have done him justice. But if Yardley appeared today to apply for a job with the National Security Agency, he would surely be turned down. Modern intelligence agencies have little room for a Huckleberry Finn."

—Michael Speers in *The Foreign Service Journal*